

Effective 'The Conjuring' Captures the Sum of All Fears

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on July 19, 2013 - 7:57am

- [1970s](#) [2]
- [Demonologist](#) [3]
- [Exorcism](#) [4]
- [Ghosts](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [John Brotherton](#) [7]
- [Lili Taylor](#) [8]
- [Movie Review](#) [9]
- [New Line Cinema](#) [10]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [11]
- [Patrick Wilson](#) [12]
- [Ron Livingston](#) [13]
- [The Conjuring](#) [14]
- [Vera Farmiga](#) [15]



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – True scary movies have a couple of things going for them – the source of the scare and the psychology of the scare. The source provides the “boo,” the audience provides the interactive psychology. “The Conjuring” is a true scary movie.

Dead serious and with a high level of performance, the story of an exorcism case in the early 1970s hits all the high notes of disturbing fright. It involves demonologists, mystery, murder, the church and the family. All the visceral elements that provide both context and empathy. The based-on-truth story is most likely stretched out, but the production takes extreme care in recreating the circumstances, for the 1970s period it's set in and the basis for all that occurs. With creepy and creative turns from Vera Farmiga, Patrick Wilson and Lili Taylor, and as directed by James Wan, “The Conjuring” ups the ante for intuitive supernatural terror.

Roger and Carolyn Perron (Ron Livingston and Lili Taylor) move their family of five daughters to a rural farmhouse. There is creep factor in the old house, as doors start closing on their own, along with unexplained noises and a presence throughout the home. Dismissing the phenomenon at first, the family keeps getting punished for their ignorance, but as the frights become more intense, it becomes time to call in the experts.



L-R: Ed (Patrick Wilson), Lorraine (Vera Farmiga), Carolyn (Lili Taylor) and Roger (Ron Livingston) in 'The Conjuring'
Photo credit: New Line Cinema

These experts are Ed and Lorraine Warren (Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga). They are “demonologists,” experts on supernatural presence in both houses and people. Lorraine puts herself in danger when exploring these situations, because she empathetically connects with those ghosts and as her husband puts it, loses a piece of herself with each case. The Perron family event, and the exorcising of the possessed house, turns out to be their most difficult challenge.

This is stylishly done, with true mystery – both of consequence and faith – creating even more desperation. There are many “boo” moments, those bumps in the night, but with the storyline and the slightly creepy intervention of the Warrens, the associated anxiety is much more acutely felt. The actual rite of exorcism isn’t brought in until the second half, so the film functions as both a ghost story and a conundrum of religion.

James Wan’s direction is precise and appropriately designed for maximum scares. The 1970s period is rendered unerringly, even with a self conscious nod to the language of the era – a funny “far out” and “groovy” exchange. This was a time in which the post-1960s revolution gave way to a more mellow hangover, and produced concerns of creatures like Big Foot, the parapsychology practiced by the Warrens and the film “The Exorcist.” Generating that mood is a vital part of the surrounding mystery.

Getting high level actors to interpret the proceedings is another strength of the film. The underrated Patrick Wilson always understands the subtleties of his characters – his Ed Warren has an undercurrent of hype master beneath his solemn exterior. Vera Farmiga was the perfect choice to be the center of ghost empathy, with her porcelain features and airy persona. Lili Taylor takes the brunt of the possession, and is talented enough to communicate the ugliness and the redemption of her plight.



Mirror, Mirror: Lorraine is Reflective in 'The Conjuring'
Photo credit: New Line Cinema

Mostly the film does this spooky atmosphere properly. There are the mordant laughs, provided by the hapless local cop (John Brotherton), but the humor is part of the overall environment and never supersedes the possession. And because the mood relies on the enigma of the deity and the devil, it disturbs that well of the psyche where faith and reality are in constant battle. If anything, the philosophy expressed – within a quote from Ed Warren at the end – is the point of contention when wrestling between belief and skepticism.

And that is the element which puts this film into horror greatness – its ability to provoke an uneasy spirit after experiencing the story. Human beings are superstitious creatures. The blessing of our perspective and intellect is accompanied with the curse of determining what exists within us and why, with the fear factor thrown in to keep us insane.

“The Conjuring” opens everywhere on July 19th. Featuring Patrick Wilson, Vera Farmiga, Lili Taylor, Ron Livingston and John Brotherton. Screenplay by Chad Hayes and Carey Hayes. Directed by James Wan. Rated “R”



[16]

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/hankq>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/1970s>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/demonologist>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/exorcism>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ghosts>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/hollywoodchicagocom-content>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/john-brotherton>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/lili-taylor>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/labels/review.html>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/new-line-cinema>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/movie-review/patrick-mcdonald>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/patrick-wilson>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/ron-livingston>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/the-conjuring>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/reviews/vera-farmiga>
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